

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



SW Iowa Easements Reduce Flooding This Spring

Laura Greiner, State Public Affairs Specialist, May 2010

After heavy spring rains in southwest Iowa several ARRA-funded floodplain easements are already reducing flood damages, providing wildlife habitat and protecting water quality.

In a two-day period this April, Lucas County received up to six inches of rain. This caused many local rivers and streams to overflow their banks, flooding agricultural land, county roads and other low-lying areas.



The Chariton River has receded from the easement on Mike and Nick Hunter's property. Water flow can be seen in the grass and the water depth is illustrated by debris in the fence.

But 930 acres of newly converted floodplain easements along the Chariton River and Whitebreast Creek helped reduce local damage caused by the flooding and protect a regional water supply. These six easements are enrolled in the Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easement Program, four of which were funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

According to USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist Jeff Mattias, about 35 local landowners expressed interest in the floodplain easement program after the floods of 2008. These landowners wanted to retire their frequently flooded ag lands and convert the areas to permanent floodplain vegetation.

"I tried farming this for years. I pastured it and worried about my cows drowning. Now I don't have to worry about fences, crops,

or cows and I still can use this land for the hunting and wildlife, which I also enjoy," said landowner Gary Gwinn.

Gwinn's 40-acre easement along the Chariton River is one of three that directly impact the water quality of Rathbun Lake. This lake is a recreational use lake and water supply source for Rathbun Regional Water Association, which serves 17 counties in southeast Iowa and north central Missouri.

Nick Hunter and his brother Mike also own land along the Chariton River, which is now enrolled in the floodplain easement program. This farm is adjacent to their parent's farm. Between the two operations, 418 acres are enrolled in ARRA-funded EWP-FPE

"The Chariton River was straightened here in the 1960's, so it could be farmed. We farmed it and pastured it before enrolling as much in filter strips as possible. Placing

this permanent easement on the CRP and other farmland will be a great environmental benefit. Protecting all of this flood prone ground from erosion and removing it from our concerns of cattle or crops being flooded every time it rains. We know this is helping all the way around as it protects Rathbun Lake, which supplies our drinking water.”

Overall, ARRA is funding 39 floodplain easements in 21 Iowa counties. These easements, worth more than \$15 million, include 4,852 acres.



The Chariton River floods Gary Gwinn's property enrolled in EWP-FPE. During the floods on 2008, the islands seen in this picture were not visible.

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